

Heresiarchs and Modern Prophets: Czesław Miłosz on Dostoevsky and Swedenborg

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Ett kännetecken av Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) litterära diskurs är hans dialog med oortodoxa religiösa tänkare. Bland hans viktigaste ”samtalspartner” finns den svenske teosofen och mystikern Emanuel Swedenborg och den ryske författaren och tänkaren Fjodor Dostojevskij. I denna artikel visar jag på vilket sätt Miłosz förknippar Dostojevskij med Swedenborg, hur han lyckas närma sig Swedenborg med hjälp av Dostojevskij och tack vare den religiösa förkunnaren och andeskådaren kasta ett nytt ljus på författaren till *Brott och straff*. I min analys refererar jag till Miłosz diskursiva verk – framför allt hans artikel ”Dostoevsky and Swedenborg” (1975) och essäistiska verk *Ziemia Ulro* (1977).

1. Outline of the problem

In his essayistic opus magnum, *The Land of Ulro* (1977), Czesław Miłosz developed a comparative narration, turning Swedenborg, Blake, Mickiewicz, Dostoevsky, Oskar Miłosz and Gombrowicz – authors endowed with extraordinary and original imagination – into its main protagonists. Years later, the author explained that his intention was to create a book about people who tried to find a way out of a crisis, whose symptoms they perceived in the surrounding world, often at the cost of madness (see Miłosz 2002: 241). According to Miłosz, in its essence, the crisis in question consisted in a broadly understood dehumanization of the world, which had been deprived of the “other space”, the space of metaphysical imagination. Miłosz regarded this crisis as a constitutive feature of modern Western civilization, which for him was an outcome of a “scientific *Weltanschauung*” (Miłosz 2002: 241). Directed against erroneous notions, misconceptions and superstitions, the crusade of science had shaped our modernity, whose main features were now rationality and secularization. But at the same time, the writer emphasizes, this crusade had also given birth to a specific cultural “underground” which had challenged it by attacking its very fundamentals in the name of values that were constitutive of pre-modern anthropology. Miłosz, who admitted to being in opposition to the contemporary “world of Western civilization”, sympathized with these cultural subversives.

From among the numerous eminent representatives of this “counterculture”, Miłosz distinguishes particularly Swedenborg and Dostoevsky. Both had put a

mirror to the contemporary man, which had helped reveal his true face; both had also pointed to the way out of Blake's "Land of Ulro", recalling the eschatological space which man had lost sight of. Miłosz gives an insightful and in-depth explanation of the sense of Swedenborg's and Dostoevsky's philosophical and religious writings and also draws attention to the significance of their works in the context of the intellectual history of modernity. He does so not only in *The Land of Ulro*, but also in his earlier essay "Dostoevsky and Swedenborg" (1975) in which the writer, first of all, outlines the typological convergences between the work of the Swedish mystic and that of the Russian author, and secondly suggests the existence of genetic links between the writings of Dostoevsky and the thought of Swedenborg.

Miłosz's conceptions are expressive and boldly formulated. At the same time, they are deeply rooted in the solid knowledge of Swedenborg's and Dostoevsky's works which the writer had acquired through years of study. For one ought to remember that Miłosz's interest in Swedenborg dates back to as early as the pre-war period, due to his extensive reading of Adam Mickiewicz's and Stanisław Brzozowski's writings as well as his literary and personal contacts with Oskar Miłosz (see Bukowski 2012: 329–333). Moreover, after the war but before his arrival in the USA, where Miłosz had an opportunity to further deepen his knowledge of Swedenborg, the writer studied the works of the Swedish mystic in France (see Merton & Miłosz 1991: 59).

Miłosz had also studied Dostoevsky's works before the outbreak of World War II. Both at that time and in the post-war period, the author of *Brothers Karamazov* had remained within the range of Miłosz's literary interests, although in his own writings, he mentioned him but sporadically (Cavanagh 2010: 7). In the USA, where in the early 70's he was offered lectures to teach on Dostoevsky, Miłosz began systematic and in-depth studies of the Russian author's works, becoming acquainted with the vast literary sources on the topic. He even considered writing a monograph devoted to Dostoevsky himself (see Cavanagh 2010: 7; Franaszek 2012: 593). All in all, one may conclude that when writing about the relations between Swedenborg and Dostoevsky, Miłosz expressed himself as an expert upon the subject, one who moreover possessed vast competence in comparative literature. In his analyses, he managed to reach extremely interesting conclusions, as thanks to his erudition and sensitivity he was able to perceive links, parallels and dependencies which had so far eluded other scholars.

In the present outline, I would like to point out in what way Miłosz associates Dostoevsky with Swedenborg, how he manages to reach Swedenborg through Dostoevsky and thanks to Swedenborg reads Dostoevsky anew. In my analysis, I shall rely above all on *The Land of Ulro* and on the article "Swedenborg and Dostoevsky". As I do not have a sufficient amount of space at my disposal to discuss in an exhaustive way the comparative discourse of the Polish author, I shall limit myself on this occasion to emphasizing and commenting on those of its aspects which seem most important and most original to me.

2. Starting point: the origins of modernity

When preparing his lectures on Dostoevsky in Berkeley, Miłosz tried to connect them with other topics of his reflections and student tutorials. An important role in these preparations was played by reflection on the issue of theodicy, which was associated with Miłosz's long-standing interests in religious doctrines and above all in Manichaeism and Christian heterodoxy. In this context, one of the points of reference must have been Swedenborg's theosophy, which Miłosz was no doubt familiar with. Yet, if one were to believe the writer, it was ultimately an attempt to place Dostoevsky within the space of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century that allowed him to reach Swedenborg and his time (Miłosz 1985: 29). Swedenborg's milieu was the eighteenth century, a time when the great moral and ideological crisis, caused by the growing awareness of the existing discrepancy between scientific truth and faith, was being defined.

In his essay entitled "Dostoevsky and the Religious Imagination of the West," published as a part of *The Land of Ulro*, Miłosz concludes that none of the great nineteenth-century novelists had so poignantly revealed the "fundamental antinomy facing modern man" as the author of *Crime and Punishment* (Miłosz 1985: 51). Transplanted to Dostoevsky's Russia the dilemma of philosophy and science versus religion became an important issue. As Miłosz tries to demonstrate by consulting the writer's notes, Dostoevsky was convinced that nineteenth-century science "refutes everything formerly held in regard" (Miłosz 1985: 52). Not being able to come to terms with it, Dostoevsky is inclined to reject the truth (scientific or rational one), as long as it contradicts faith. While analyzing the views and literary works of the author of *Brothers Karamazov*, Miłosz concludes that:

Dostoevsky's religious thought distills the leading Western controversy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time the assault on religion in the name of so called objective truth entailed a threefold negation: the denial of Original Sin, the rejection of the Incarnation, and the secularization of Christian eschatology. Western defenders of the Christian religion who reacted to the assault used tactics similar to those used later by Dostoevsky. (Miłosz 1985: 52)

One of the first defenders of these truths against the tyranny of the mind was Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish-born scientist, naturalist and philosopher, who having experienced a religious crisis in 1744, as he himself puts it, received the charism of the prophet of the New Church. Being himself one of the most outstanding scientists of his time, Swedenborg knew where man who had been liberated from "superstition" and who strives exclusively for the "scientifically proven truth" is heading. He was able to envisage the birth of a world without God and without man; he saw Christianity which according to him was entering a phase of its ultimate decline (Miłosz 1985: 140). Swedenborg mentions many causes of this great crisis of Christianity (see Bukowski 2012: 339–340). In the context of Dostoevsky, Miłosz emphasizes one of them, na-

mely: the already mentioned tendency to obliterate the essence of the original sin, in the name of the (truly superstitious) faith in “good and reasonable nature of man”. “Swedenborg found the origin of *cosmic* Evil in man’s *proprium*” – says Milosz in *The Land of Ulro* (Milosz 1985: 52–53). As the poet observes, the unorthodox disciple of the Swedish mystic – William Blake, followed suit. “Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* is a culmination of the same line” (Milosz 1985: 53).

Like Swedenborg, Dostoevsky was an advocate of man’s responsibility. According to the former, each and every one of us is endowed with free will, so as to be able to make a free choice between truth and good on the one hand, and evil and falsehood on the other (Swedenborg 2009: § 463–508). It was also in this spirit that the Russian author opposed the attempts undertaken by the “progressive” intelligentsia to free man from responsibility for his deeds and to shift it onto so called external factors (environment). As Milosz writes, this tendency was perceived by Dostoevsky as a “depressing proof of Christianity’s decline among educated Russians” (Milosz 1985: 251).

According to Swedenborg, when being confronted with the choice between good and evil, man should always remember his vocation – for each of us is called upon to become one with God. Swedenborg was of the opinion that over centuries, humanity has forgotten about this call and that is why God had to remind us about it by appearing before us in the human shape – as Jesus Christ. “For Swedenborg, God in Heaven has a human form; Christ’s humanity is thus a perfect fulfillment of the Godhead” (Milosz 1985: 53). At the same time, there is a fundamental difference between God-man and Man-god. The latter one is represented in Swedenborg’s thought by Charles XII of Sweden, a demonic ruler suffering from hypertrophy of *proprium*, a tyrant who considered himself to be God. The latter is submerged in the inferno of his own desire for power (Swedenborg 1889: § 4764).

The above issue is in the very center of Swedenborg’s theology, but – as Milosz points out – it also constitutes one of the leading notions in Dostoevsky’s entire way of thinking. One clearly finds in him a critique of the atheist idea of the Man-god in the name of the vision of the God-man. Milosz suggests that Dostoevsky’s own determination in this struggle is connected with the fact that initially he himself believed in Man-god (as a member of the Petrashevsky circle), and only later did he come to believe in God-man. This faith in Christ, God who became human, comes to the surface in the writer’s novels, and even more prominently in his publicist discourse. I think it is worth recalling here a note from *The Writer’s Diary* dating back to August 1880. When writing about the conflict of the Roman empire with the early Christian church, Dostoevsky concludes that what humanity had witnessed then was a collision between “two of the most contradictory ideas which could have been born on earth, namely the encounter between the Man-god and the God-man, the Belvedere Apollo and Christ”. Unfortunately, he adds, shortly afterwards a compromise was born: a marriage between the empire and the Church (Dostojewski 1982: 421).

The notion and image of God's humanity – writes Miłosz in *The Land of Ulro* – tones down the inhumanity of the world and ameliorates God's indifference to our demands (Miłosz 1985: 215). Observing the Divine humanity of Christ as incarnated God the Father-Man, Swedenborg shows that it constitutes our hope and rescue from the inhuman, infinite universe in which man is homeless.

The eighteenth-century cosmos: myriads of planets spinning around in an infinite space. Easily said; but let us try to imagine to locate our home in that infinity. Swedenborg understood that the only refuge lay in assigning a central place to the Divine Human. And what distinguished the human if not the mind and imagination – the inner life of a subject, in other words – whence that other world, the subjective, which was not only parallel to the objective world but was its reason and purpose. [...] Dostoevsky (*“Vsy i budushchem stoletii – “All depends on the next century”*) would be right in reducing the dilemma of the age, both his own and the succeeding one, to a choice between the God-man and the Man-god. (Miłosz 1985: 153–154)

At this point it is worth drawing attention to the close affinity between the soteriological thought of the Russian writer and the teaching of the Swedish mystic. As Miłosz emphasizes, “Dostoevsky's Christology becomes somewhat less enigmatic when it is compared with Swedenborg's Christology” (Miłosz 2010a: 166).

In the above-presented vision, both Swedenborg and Dostoevsky loom to us as thinkers who, even at the price of being accused of heterodoxy or even heresy, propagated their visions which were maintained in the spirit of anthropocentrism and Godmanhood (Miłosz 1985: 149). As Miłosz emphasizes, they did so in stark contradiction to the predominant ideology of their century, including its religious views.

Heretic religious thought appeals to one's imagination. The heterodox thinkers, such as Blake, Mickiewicz, Swedenborg and Dostoevsky, “are beyond the line drawn by the theologians”. In their thought, there occurs a bold transposition of concepts into images – it is a transformation which Miłosz holds to be of fundamental significance (see Bukowski 2011). In the writer's opinion, the inhabitants of Ulro need live images, a metaphysical space in which they could feel at home.

Acting in the interest of liberating the imagination which had been fettered by the scientific world-view and the Lutheran theology (Miłosz 1985: 224), Swedenborg had on numerous occasions been accused of heresy in his native country; that is why he often chose the liberal Holland and England as a place of residence. He was attacked by both the orthodox Lutherans and the advocates of reason and commonsense, like Kant. Dostoevsky's religious convictions had also aroused numerous controversies. Miłosz recalls that Anna Akhmatova had called Dostoevsky a “heresiarch”, because of “his heresy derived from his love of Russia and his concern for the future of Christianity” (Miłosz 1985: 55). To a similar degree as Swedenborg, Dostoevsky was filled with an “eschatological passion”; he wrote about the providential role of the Russian peasants, and about

the Russian Messianism prophesying the approaching apocalypse. He appealed to the Russians to convert and oppose the destructive force of self-will and self-love of individuals.

3. Prophets

While analyzing the words of Swedenborg and Dostoevsky, as aimed at eschatological space and directed against the spirit of their times, Miłosz often refers to the concept of prophetism, presenting both “heresiarchs” as prophets. Who is a prophet? According to the biblical tradition, due to his mission, a prophet possesses a special religious authority which allows him to proclaim the word of God in His name. The proclamation of God’s word, in turn, signifies an explanation of God’s will and thought which are expressed in His words (Lindblom 1963: 109, 29).

Swedenborg regarded himself as being equal to the prophets of the Old Testament and often referred to them, for instance when he explained how he received his revelations (Benz 1969: 217). He built his authority as a prophet very consistently and so convincingly that he was recognized as one not only by his contemporary followers, but also by his subsequent disciples (see Bukowski 2003). Among the latter was also Adam Mickiewicz, who referred to Swedenborg as a “modern prophet” (Weintraub 1982: 196; Miłosz 1985: 108).

As Miłosz reminds us, Swedenborg, the “modern prophet”, announced the beginning of the New Church (Miłosz 1985: 110). The author of *The Land of Ulro* sets him side by side with such prophets of the “new era” as Blake, Dostoevsky and Oskar Miłosz, whose word had built the Church of the Reborn Imagination. Among them Dostoevsky is the most interesting figure, as his thought is the least unequivocal.

According to Miłosz, proof of Dostoevsky’s “prophetic gift” was the fact that the writer foresaw an (anti-)religious revolution which elevated Man-god above God-man (Miłosz 2006: 86). Thus, he noticed the approaching apocalypse of values over the horizon and – as Nikolai Berdyaev, whom Miłosz recalls in his work, observed – “he revealed the truth that the Russian revolution is a metaphysical and religious, and not a political and social phenomenon” (Miłosz 2010a: 143). Dostoevsky’s novel *The Possessed* proved to be quite prophetic in this respect. “The prophetic power of *The Possessed* was felt by Russians at once, beginning with articles in *Landmarks*, and after the Revolution even the Communists praised *The Possessed* as a prophecy – not realizing that they were the devils Dostoevsky was trying to exorcise” – states Miłosz in a conversation with Carl Proffer (Miłosz 2006a: 49).

It is precisely in this novel that Dostoevsky paints a picture of a revolutionary who although he regains his freedom, nevertheless remains in the bondage of his own self. For, according to the writer, man is unable to bear the burden of his own self; he is also unable to affirm his own homelessness. Like Swedenborg,

Dostoevsky perceives the misery of the “natural” man who is looking for space for himself outside the spiritual world.

Lev Shestov, highly regarded by Milosz, also wrote about Dostoevsky’s prophetism; among other issues, he wondered about the sources of the authority of the author of *Brothers Karamazov*. For Dostoevsky was indeed perceived by many as a prophet; the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov who was a friend of Dostoevsky even called him “God’s Prophet”. It is not known whether Dostoevsky himself believed in his special sacred vocation; according to Shestov, he certainly wanted others to believe in this (Shestov 2005: 38). In any case, the writer’s diary testifies to the fact that the author saw himself in the role of a prophet. As Shestov suggests, Dostoevsky’s prophesies (the majority of which did not come true) had their source in the author’s Christology, whereas the latter originated from the specific interpretation of the Gospels, as well as from the experience of the “underground”: humiliation and “katorga” (penal colony) (Shestov 2005: 44). Let us note that also in the case of Swedenborg, the awareness of an prophetic vocation is born out of the experience of an existential crisis as well as a new interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. This is best confirmed by his *Journal of Dreams* from the years 1743–44, which Milosz was probably unfamiliar with.

Czeslaw Milosz justly pointed out the fact that the fundamental content of Dostoevsky’s prophetic vision consists in a “separation of science and art from religion”, which was to have taken place in the twentieth century (Milosz 2006: 181); he also justly confronted this vision with the warnings and prophesies of other “modern prophets”. After all, Swedenborg’s theological thought was also oriented at counteracting the ever broadening schism, the “great separation” of man from God, spirit from nature as well as love from faith (Swedenborg 1892: § 50).

Complementing as it were Milosz’s thought, it is worth mentioning at this point that in Dostoevsky’s opinion, the process of separating from each other the important domains of man’s activity is associated with the progressing sickness of isolation and “dissociation”; the latter leading to a growing atomization and anomie of society.

Indeed, I keep thinking that we have begun the epoch of Universal “dissociation” – states Dostoevsky in *A Writer’s Diary*. All are dissociating themselves, isolating themselves from everyone else, everyone wants to invent something of his own, something new and unheard of. Everybody sets aside all those things that used to be common to our thoughts and feelings. [...] Meanwhile, there is scarcely anything about which we can agree morally; everything has been or is being broken up, not even into clusters, but into single fragments. (Dostoyevsky 2009a: 145)

An individual who suffers from such isolation and dissociation appears to wander around in the alien space of modernity, which is nothing else but a projection of its own spiritual sovereignty. The ultimate curse of this sovereignty is the inability of the individual to rely on any form of external authority. In turn

sovereignty is juxtaposed by Dostoevsky to the idea of humbling oneself before Christ's cross and of trustful "adherence" through one's imagination to God-man (see Milosz 2006a: 50 and 1985: 266). At the same time, in his polyphonic works, the writer presented (and confronted with one other in a most suggestive way) the images of isolation and erosion of religious faith and of wandering in the space of *proprium*. Man's wandering in the eschatological space whose boundaries are marked out by self-love was also presented by Swedenborg in his innumerable *Memorabilia*. The similarity between Swedenborg's descriptions of symbolic (based on correspondences) space and the images which we come across in *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, makes one wonder.

4. Reception

While looking for the spiritual patrons of the vision of the "other modernity", Milosz sets Dostoevsky side by side with Swedenborg, revealing important typological similarities between their "missions". Besides the similarities, the author of *The Land of Ulro* also manages to perceive some genetic dependencies which may (at least partially) explain the existence of the former.

In his article entitled "Dostoevsky and Swedenborg", Milosz comes to the conclusion that "Swedenborg may be linked with Dostoevsky in two ways" (Milosz 1975: 302). Firstly, one may point out that both thinkers defended the Christian eschatology against the skepticism of reason in a similar cultural context (also due to Russia's civilizational backwardness). And secondly, one may note the existence of certain "borrowings" from Swedenborg in Dostoevsky's writings:

To affirm that they exist is not farfetched, for even the books in Dostoevsky's library supply a sort of material proof. The catalogue of Dostoevsky's library, published in 1922 by Leonid Grossman, lists three such books. These are, all in Russian, the following: A.N. Aksakov, *The Gospel According to Swedenborg: Five Chapters of the Gospel of John with an Exposition and a Discussion of Their Spiritual Meaning According to the Teaching on Correspondences* (Leipzig, 1864); A.N. Aksakov, *On Heaven, the World of Spirits and on Hell, as They Were Seen and Heard by Swedenborg*, translation from the Latin (Leipzig 1863); A.N. Aksakov, *The Rationalism of Swedenborg: A Critical Analysis of His Teachings on the Holy Writ* (Leipzig 1879). (Milosz 1975: 303)

Milosz very justly draws attention to Dostoevsky's unfavorable attitude towards spiritualism, which appears here in the context of Aleksandr N. Aksakov's activity. Referring to my earlier remarks on the issue of "isolation" and "dissociation", I would like to note that in his diary Dostoevsky accuses precisely the spiritualists headed by Aksakov of spreading this "social disease". "Isolation" is a rift, a split which separates a group of "believing" mystics from the rest of the Russian society. More importantly, the almost grotesque argument which evol-

ved between the tsarist Scholarly Commission on Spiritualistic Phenomena and the spiritualists themselves led to an even sharper, epistemological rift. “Faith and mathematical proofs are two irreconcilable things” – warns Dostoevsky (2009a: 152). Naturally, such a situation was anything but conducive towards integration under the banner of the idea of Slavic Messianism, which the author of *The Possessed* had tried to propagate on the basis of the Orthodox faith. In this context, the famous anecdotes concerning Swedenborg’s prophetic (or clairvoyant?) gifts, which the spiritualist Aksakov found to be fascinating, could have filled Dostoevsky with nothing but aversion. Nonetheless, one ought to bear in mind that the writer’s extremely anti-materialistic attitude made him analyze the phenomenon of spiritualism very carefully (and not without certain dose of respect).

The question which naturally forces itself, concerning written evidence that Dostoevsky actually read Swedenborg’s works (in Aksakov’s translations and paraphrases), is left unanswered by Miłosz. Whereas in the Polish version of his article, Miłosz leaves us yet another trace: “Dostoevsky had two French editions of the works of Balzac in his library, for example. And he had read some Balzac earlier, in his youth. Although Balzac had a very poor, secondhand knowledge of Swedenborg, he admired him greatly, and we can consider Balzac’s ‘Swedenborgian’ novels, such as *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert* as ‘intermediaries’” (Miłosz 2010a: 166–167). The above-mentioned novels were famous all over Europe and they could indeed have inspired Dostoevsky; however, there is evidence which indicates that Dostoevsky had a much more profound knowledge of Swedenborg’s theology than can be derived from Balzac’s novels. The sources of this knowledge are probably the above-mentioned books by Swedenborg/Aksakov, articles in the Russian press (Vinitsky 2009: 129), and comments made by Dostoevsky’s young friend, Vladimir Solovyov.¹

From Dostoevsky’s *Notebook* (which Miłosz does not mention in this context), we learn that the Russian writer was looking for images of life after death in Swedenborg’s works. He was looking for visions of condemnation and the devils which would inspire his eschatological imagination: “Are there devils? I could never imagine Satan. Job, Mephisto, Swedenborg: wicked people [...] On Swedenborg [here!]” (quoted after Vinitsky 2009: 126). The entry may testify to the fact that Dostoevsky was considering writing something about Swedenborg in connection with his teachings about life after life.² These problems were of great interest to Dostoevsky, who devoted a lot of attention to the issue of “life

¹ Solovyov referred to Swedenborg in his theosophical works (see e.g. Solowjow 1986: 115) and wrote an article on the Swedish mystic for the *Brokgauz-Efrim encyclopedia* (Vinitsky 2009: 208).

² According to Vinitsky, “Dostoevsky is referring here to Swedenborg’s unorthodox interpretation of the devil in his *Heaven and Its Wonders*” (Vinitsky 2009: 126). See also the writer’s positive commentary on Swedenborg’s “beautiful book about heaven, paradise and hell” in his unpublished fragment on clairvoyance and Swedenborg from May-June 1877 (Vinitsky 2009: 132).

after death” and the resurrection of bodies.³ In his notes from the years 1875–76, already after the publication of *The Possessed* (*The Devils*), the issue of “devils” and a belief in their existence appears on several occasions – not only in connection with the problem of spiritualism. In my opinion, it is an important signal for someone who would like to subject Dostoevsky’s writings to a “swedenborgian trial”. It is precisely in the fictional images of hell upon earth, or rather of the infernal spiritual space, that one can detect Dostoevsky’s acquaintance with Swedenborg’s writings.

In his essay on Dostoevsky and Swedenborg, Milosz devotes a lot of space to an analysis of Swedenborgian elements in *Crime and Punishment*. According to him, an important clue to this novel is the idea of correspondence developed by the Swedish mystic.

The doctrine of correspondences is treated at length in Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, which Dostoevsky purchased in Aksakov’s translation probably during his stay in Germany in 1865. Let us note the place and date of publication: Leipzig, 1863. *Crime and Punishment* was begun in Wiesbaden in 1865. (Milosz 1975: 306)

In an attempt to justify the above hypothesis, Milosz quotes a few fragments from *Heaven and Hell*, of which the most significant seems to be the following: “‘What a correspondence is, is not known at the present day’, says Swedenborg, ‘for several reasons, the chief of which is that man has withdrawn himself from heaven by the love of self and love of the world’ (*Heaven and Hell*, § 87)” (Milosz 1975: 306). And therefore the mystery of correspondence is associated with the catastrophe of the great separation, of man’s fall from the Divine-human Oneness, which occurred entirely through man’s fault. In the most general sense, the principle of correspondence combines the spiritual with the material world, being also a source of materialization of man’s spiritual states in the afterlife. For depending on what “ruling love” is specific to any given man, such is the space he is bound to exist in, in the afterlife. “Every heaven or hell is a precise reproduction of the states of mind a given man experienced when on earth, and it appears accordingly – as beautiful gardens, groves or the slums of a big city” (Milosz 1975: 307). It is not difficult to note that in the materializations of hell described by Swedenborg, the predominant images are those of darkness, tightness of space, dirt, dampness and mustiness (Andrzejewski 1992: 52). On the other hand, if there is talk of households or settlements, we are confronted with images of urban ugliness going hand in hand with the moral decline of the inhabitants. It may well be that Swedenborg had made use here of his own impressions – maybe not so much from Sweden, but from London where he had spent many years of his life. The London of the second half of the eighteenth century had already been a powerful metropolis which delighted visitors with

³ See for example his satirical short story *Bobok* (1873), which can be read in the context of Swedenborg’s teachings of the consciousness of sinners (Vinitsky 2009: 121–123), or comments on devils and spiritualism in *A Writer’s Diary* (Dostoevsky 2009a: 115–122).

its urban impetus, but also inspired fear with its murky backstreets, concealing poverty and crime. A hundred years later this dark, “infernal” side of London was observed by Dostoevsky, who had paid a visit to the city in 1862 (Grossman 1968: 232–234).

The operation of the principle of correspondence is perceived by Milosz in the picture of St. Petersburg presented in *Crime and Punishment*: “the streets of St. Petersburg, the dust, the water of the canals, the stairs of tenement houses are described as seen by Raskolnikov and thus acquire the quality of his feverish state” (Milosz 1975: 308). But it is not Raskolnikov but his demonic double Svidrigailov that is, according to Milosz, the most Swedenborgian figure, betraying his “kinship with the spirits of Swedenborg”, “as though he had just arrived from the beyond”. Svidrigailov suffers from a disease which is called self-love, which, “according to Swedenborg, characterizes all the inhabitants of the infernal realm” (Milosz 1975: 308). It is precisely in this context that Milosz analyzes the intriguing dialogue between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov:

“What do people generally say?” muttered Svidrigailov, as though speaking to himself, looking aside and bowing his head. “They say, ‘You are ill, so what appears to you is only unreal fantasy.’ But that’s not strictly logical. I agree that ghosts only appear to the sick, but that only proves that they are unable to appear except to the sick, not that they don’t exist.”

“Nothing of the sort,” Raskolnikov insisted irritably.

“No? You don’t think so?” Svidrigailov went on, looking at him deliberately. “But what do you say to this argument (help me with it): ghosts are, as it were, shreds and fragments of other worlds, the beginning of them. A man in health has, of course, no reason to see them, because he is above all a man of this earth and is bound for the sake of completeness and order to live only in this life. But as soon as one is ill, as soon as the normal earthly order of the organism is broken, one begins to realise the possibility of another world; and the more seriously ill one is, the closer becomes one’s contact with that other world, so that as soon as the man dies he steps straight into that world. I thought of that long ago. If you believe in a future life, you could believe in that, too.”

“I don’t believe in a future life,” said Raskolnikov.

Svidrigailov sat lost in thought.

“And what if there are only spiders there, or something of that sort,” he said suddenly.

“He is a madman,” thought Raskolnikov.

“We always imagine eternity as something beyond our conception, something vast, vast! But why must it be vast? Instead of all that, what if it’s one little room, like a bath house in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner, and that’s all eternity is? I sometimes fancy it like that.”

“Can it be you can imagine nothing juster and more comforting than that?” Raskolnikov cried, with a feeling of anguish.

“Juster? And how can we tell, perhaps that is just, and do you know it’s what I would certainly have made it,” answered Svidrigailov, with a vague smile. (Dostoevsky 2006: 206)

The author of *The Land of Ulro* is of the opinion that this image of a private hell comes directly from Swedenborg. It is difficult to verify this statement, although undoubtedly Milosz accurately remarks that the image of a tiny, cramped and smoky room corresponding to the inner state of the protagonist, may be referred to paragraph 586 of *Heaven and Hell*, where there is talk of primitive cottages, inhabited by infernal spirits.⁴ Similar images recur also in the Swedish mystic's *Memorabilia*.

Svidrigailov's frightening images and dreams are a "second space" (Milosz), in which he is bound to lead his existence; they are a space which paradoxically is more real than the external, empirical one. Captivated by evil and falsehood, this man wanders around like a ghost in the space of evil and falsehood, not being able to step outside the boundaries of his own *proprium*. According to Swedenborg's teaching, he is his own judge and prisoner. The thought concerning the maximally shrunk eschatological space (which Milosz devotes too little attention to); the space which is shrunk to the size of a persistent or recurrent image, could be in my opinion the fruit of Dostoevsky's creative reception of Swedenborg.

Thus a lot seems to indicate that "Dostoevsky read Swedenborg when working on *Crime and Punishment*" (Milosz 1975: 311). Milosz is certainly right in saying that the issue of influence should not be limited here to narrative details, nonetheless, it is precisely an analysis of details that allows us to perceive traces of Swedenborg's thought in the polyphonic world of Dostoevsky's novels.

In the last section of his article "Dostoevsky and Swedenborg", Milosz turns to the last work of the Russian author, namely *Brothers Karamazov*. Yet again, it is the work of Leonid Grossman that becomes a signpost for Milosz's own research:

When describing the books in Dostoevsky's library, Leonid Grossman admits the probability of Swedenborg's influence on what we may consider Dostoevsky's last word in religious matters, the discourses of Father Zosima on prayer, love, hell, and contact with other worlds. (Milosz 1975: 317)

Grossman is referring here to the cautions which Father Zosima gives us shortly before his death: *Of Prayer, of Love, and of Contact with other Worlds* and *Of Hell and Hell Fire, a Mystic Reflection* (Dostoyevsky 2009b: 354, 359). Yet it seems to me that in the words of Zosima there is much less of Swedenborg's thought than Grossman and Milosz seem to suggest. Let us draw attention to the first words of the meditation on hell: "'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love [more]". The reference here is to the "the fiery thirst of spiritual love" which consumes a creature who has not loved here,

⁴ "Some hells present an appearance like the ruins of houses and cities after conflagrations, in which infernal spirits dwell and hide themselves. In the milder hells there is an appearance of rude huts, in some cases contiguous in the form of a city with lanes and streets, and within the houses are infernal spirits engaged in unceasing quarrels, enmities, fightings, and brutalities; while in the streets and lanes robberies and depredations are committed." (Swedenborg 1900: § 586)

upon this earth. For its life has passed, and with it, the chance for heroic love, “and now there is a gulf fixed between that life and this existence” (Dostoyevsky 2009b: 359). This existential theology of love has but little in common with “Swedenborg’s pronouncements”, particularly those regarding hell, which “is made up of spirits living in falsehood and deprived of the feeling of love for God and neighbor” (Andrzejewski 1992: 52).

What seems closer to the thought of the Swedish mystic are those of Zosima’s remarks which concern people who persist in pride and thus voluntarily sentence themselves to a life in hell.⁵ Here one is really reminded of Swedenborg’s descriptions of the life of spirits, whose true element are evil and falsehood that spring from self-love (Swedenborg 1900: § 578), although in my opinion, the above similarities do not concern the very essence of the problem.

It is difficult to present exhaustively, in a short article, such a vast and complex problem as is Czeslaw Milosz’s reflection on the correlation between Dostoevsky’s and Swedenborg’s thought. In my article, I have merely touched upon a few aspects of this issue which in my opinion are important. Perhaps at this stage the most accurate summing up of this still incomplete and cursory analysis would be the conclusion which Milosz himself had drawn in the course of his analysis of the Swedenborgian motifs in *Crime and Punishment*: “Dostoevsky’s strategy as a religious thinker is of more consequence than possible borrowings of details, and Swedenborg’s writings may offer some clues in this respect” (Milosz 1975: 311). It is precisely this cognitive angle that predominates in the essay of the Polish poet: through Swedenborg and his “heavenly mysteries”, he tries to understand the *arcana* of Dostoevsky’s religious thought. But at the same time, one must not forget that as critics of the inhuman Land of Ulro and visionary architects (restorers?) of alternative eschatological space – Dostoevsky and Swedenborg, heresiarchs and “modern prophets”, were equally important to Milosz himself.

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⁵ “Oh, there are some who remain proud and fierce even in hell, in spite of their certain knowledge and contemplation of the absolute truth; there are some fearful ones who have given themselves over to Satan and his proud spirit entirely. For such, hell is voluntary and ever consuming; they are tortured by their own choice. For they have cursed themselves, cursing God and life. They live upon their vindictive pride like a starving man in the desert sucking blood out of his own body. But they are never satisfied, and they refuse forgiveness, they curse God Who calls them. They cannot behold the living God without hatred, and they cry out that the God of life should be annihilated, that God should destroy Himself and His own creation.” (Dostoyevsky 2009b: 360)

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